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TAGS: KPAO PHUM OPRC KMDR OIIP PREL CE LTTE

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: DEPARTMENT'S AUGUST 19 STATEMENT
ON SRI LANKA GARNERS COPIOUS MEDIA COVERAGE

¶11. SUMMARY. The Department's August 19 statement on Sri Lanka elicited widespread media coverage, with the vast majority of papers (both English and vernacular) placing the statement very prominently in above-the-fold banner headlines. TV news programs on August 20 also led with the full statement, and carried it again on their evening broadcasts. Editorial comment adopted the tone of the statement and called for a return to peace talks. END SUMMARY.

Headlines

¶12. Headlines on August 21 uniformly praised the statement, with the independent English DAILY MIRROR bannerizing: "Stop killings and start talking peace: U.S. tells LTTE." Typical of the coverage was government-owned English DAILY NEWS, which said: "U.S. urges LTTE to cease killings return to talks; President Kumaratunga shows desire to move forward on peace process." The independent English DAILY ISLAND led with: "U.S. tightens screws on Tigers; Iyer killing triggers avalanche of condemnation." Even the pro-LTTE Tamil daily SUDAR OLI reported: "The U.S. press the government and the LTTE to resume talks immediately." Independent Sinhala flagship paper LAKBIMA said: "Assistance scheduled for Sri Lanka will come only if the peace process is moved forward - America emphasizes." The mainstream independent Sinhala DIVAINA said: "Renounce all types of violence including suicide bombings, political killings: restart peace talks with the government - another stern statement from America."

¶13. Television coverage of the statement was also widespread, with stations in all three languages -- both government-owned and independent -- leading with the text almost verbatim on the afternoon news broadcasts, and replaying it in the evening.

Editorial excerpts:

¶13. Under the header "World concern amplifies at LTTE terror," the government-owned English DAILY NEWS (08/21) commented: "Yesterday's statement by the U.S. government, coming close on the heels of one by the EU, highlighting the need for the LTTE to enter immediately the negotiary process with the Lankan government, further amplifies concern by (a) section of the world community over the LTTE's unimpressive track record on accelerating the peace effort.... Thus is LTTE intransigence and unconscionable backsliding continuing to shock the peace-loving sections of the world community.... Mindless recalcitrance would take the LTTE nowhere."

¶14. Under the header "Myth of sole representative blasted," the independent English daily ISLAND commented (08/21): ".... Whether these nations, which involved themselves in the Sri Lankan issue solely on humanitarian grounds will take measures to prevent the massacre of these innocents will be seen in the coming days.... Of how the 'international community' wittingly and unwittingly became embroiled in this 'Peace Process' is too well known to be detailed.... the 'international community' awoke last week after a spate of killings of EPDP members and issued a somewhat strong statement for the first time.... It is time these western nations and Japan acknowledged this fact and told it to the LTTE warlords."

¶15. COMMENT: The widespread and prominent attention the media gave the statement reflects keen interest in the U.S. position regarding the peace process. The statement served to reassure television and newspaper audiences that the U.S. remains engaged and concerned on this issue. END COMMENT.

ENTWISTLE